THE

CIRCULAR LETTER

OF THE

England. — Churches, etc. — Baptists

EASTERN ASSOCIATION,

HELD AT

TRING, HERTS.

JUNE 5th and 6th, MDCCLXXXI.

VOL. III. Octavo.

CONTEMPLATIONS on the

I. DIVINITY of the Lord Jesus Christ, demonstrated from the Name Jehovah, ascribed to him above 178 Times in Scripture; the Name GOD, ascribed to him above 100 Times; all the Divine Perfections, ascribed to him in as full a Sense as to GOD the Father, the Divine Works of Creation, Providence, Redemption, Regeneration, the Resurrection of the Dead, and Eternal Judgment; with above 70 Acts of Divine Worship paid to him in Scripture.

II. CONTEMPLATIONS on the Divinity, Personality, and gracious Operations of the Holy Spirit at large, demonstrated from all the Parts of the sacred Scriptures.

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By JOHN RYLAND, A. M. Northampton.

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By J. RYLAND, junior, of Northampton.

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To the Proteſtant Diſſenting Churches uſually denominated BAPTISTS, aſſembling for Divine Worſhip

At Cambridge; §
Cheneys, Bucks; §
Cheſham, Bucks; §
Colnbrook, Bucks; §
Hertford; §
Hempſtead, Herts; §
Hitchin, Herts; §
Over, Camb; §
Tring, Herts; §
Woodrow, Bucks:

This CIRCULAR LETTER is with great Reſpect addreſſed

By Robert Robinſon, §
Hugh Giles, §
James Sleap, §
Robert Baſkerville §
John Liddon, §
John Geard; §
Henry Blaine, §
Richard Morris. §
James Blake;
Wm. Harris,
Wm. Auſtin;
Wm. Wild,
Wm. Rackſtraw,
Geo. Mountſerd;
James Field,
James Harris;
John Cutler,
John Clement;

Miniſters, and Meſſengers, Repreſenting the ſaid Churches in Aſſociation.

HONOURED BRETHREN,

ON theſe occaſions it has been our cuſtom to addreſs you in a circular letter; and to give you a word of encouragement and advice, agreeable to the general ſtate of the churches connected together in this annual aſſociation. In the preſent ſtate of imperfection, we muſt always expect the account we have will be mixed: and that there will be ſome reaſon for ſorrow as well as joy. A ſtate of perfection is an object of hope.

We venture to affirm, that our churches are the beſt conſtituted religious ſocieties in the whole world. They have to do with nothing but religion. They are formed upon the wiſe and liberal plan of Jeſus Chriſt; who came to redeem his people from ſlavery to Satan, their own paſſions, and the tyranny of men. Hence his command, *Call no man your father upon the earth, for one is your father, who is in heaven. Neither be ye called maſters, for one is your maſter, even Chriſt.*

Strong, good conſtitutions are ſometimes ſubject to decline: but give them time they will recover themſelves. So it is with the churches we repreſent,

they are ſubject to diſorders; but when the principles, on which they are conſtituted, operate, they throw off their diſorders, and health and vigour return again.

We thank God our principles are better underſtood than they were, and our ſocieties in general flouriſh, not only in this kingdom; but in other parts of the world.

It would be eaſy to account for the various unpleaſing things, which ſometimes happen, and interrupt our peace. When we conſider the ſtate of human nature, we ſhall have reaſon to wonder they are upon the whole ſo few, and in many inſtances, ſo trifling as they are. Hence we might derive an argument in favour of the truth of our principles, that they are of God.

Who that conſiders the different tempers, weakneſſes, former prejudices of the members of our ſocieties (which are all voluntary ones) but muſt wonder they ſubſiſt ſo peaceably, that interruptions are ſo ſeldom, and that liberty and love in general reign? Theſe are bonds more ſtrong and glorious than forced uniformity, temporal emolument, blind ſubmiſſion or ſlaviſh fear.

Two reaſons engage us to addreſs you on this ſubject, at this time. When differences ariſe between perſons profeſſing godlineſs, or any of them act inconſiſtently with the character they ſuſtain, ſome who are weak are ſtumbled, others who are wicked triumph. The weak, not conſidering that men, who are good upon the whole, may ſometimes be overtaken, that bad men always have mixed with the good, that there was a Judas among the Diſciples of Chriſt, that the Goſpel teaches us to expect ſuch

caſes,

caſes, becauſe it provides for them. The weak, I ſay, not conſidering theſe things are hurt. The wicked, who are enemies to the Goſpel, take advantage of the failings of ſome of its profeſſors, and conclude there is nothing in Chriſtianity itſelf. Before ſuch triumph they ſhould prove, That there are none living under the influence of its truths, or rather, that it is defective in itſelf, and that errors in the conduct of its profeſſors naturally ariſe from Chriſtian Principles. If this be not done, nothing is proved but their malice and ignorance.

We mean then, Brethren, to caution you againſt miſtakes, and to exhort you to hold faſt the profeſſion of your faith without wavering. You eaſily ſee how many exhortations we might ſubjoin. We might exhort you to hold faſt the doctrines, and duties of religion, which you hold in common with other Chriſtians. Theſe we waive, becauſe they are conſtantly taught in all your churches.

You are Proteſtant Diſſenters holding the right of private judgment, the ſufficiency of Scripture, the ſole dominion of Chriſt over conſcience, and univerſal toleration. Theſe principles we now exhort you to hold faſt.

I. They are *ſound* principles. Examine them by the Scripture—the nature of God—the nature of man. The more they are examined the more juſt they will appear. In every acceptable act of worſhip, there muſt be reverence for the object, God—obedience to his revealed will, and inclination in the performer. Can ſuch worſhip be performed, if your principles are not admitted?

II. They are *plain* principles. They commend themſelves to every man's underſtanding and conſcience. Papiſts, when they ſplit into parties, act

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on them. Proteſtants, when they reform, do the ſame. All claim the right for themſelves, though they deny it to others. The Scriptures ſay, *Every one of us muſt give an account of himſelf to God.* Therefore every one ought to judge for himſelf.

III. They are *liberal* principles. You in this reſpect do unto others, as you would they ſhould do unto you. Your cauſe is the cauſe of all mankind. Your principles expoſe the Bible to publick view, make Chriſt the ſole inſtructor of mankind in matters of religion, put all upon a level in things pertaining to conſcience, give every capacity full liberty to expand itſelf, provide for the weakeſt, deſtroy human authority in worſhip, the idol uniformity, the monſter perſecution, and all thoſe bad diſpoſitions and principles which heretofore have deluged the earth with tears and blood.

IV. They are *honourable* principles. They advance the human mind to its true dignity. They are honoured with the moſt illuſtrious names, who have acted on them; Patriarchs, Prophets, Apoſtles, reformers, with Jeſus Chriſt the founder of our religion, are among the number. Theſe principles we exhort you to *hold faſt without wavering.*

1. Yourſelves. They may coſt you the honours of this world; but in connection with the doctrines and duties of Chriſtianity, they will end in heavenly honours. In general, Chriſtianity is advantageous in this world, it teaches to avoid vice, to practiſe virtue, frugality, induſtry, &c. It is true, your profeſſion is attended with ſome expences. But theſe are a mere trifle when compared with the charge of faſhionable vices and diverſions, from which they preſerve you.

2. Promote

2. Promote them by your advice, your prayers, your preſence in all the ſtated aſſemblies of the church; eſpecially church and prayer meetings. Theſe are the life of a church, without which it cannot flouriſh.

3. Spread them among the riſing generation. They will deſtroy popery, and bring on the kingdom of Chriſt. Above all adorn them by your lives. Avoid every thing that has the appearance of evil. Deteſt every thing mean. Cheriſh every generous and noble diſpoſition. Make the Son of God your example. Hold faſt, and you ſhall receive a crown of life. To Chriſt alone be ſole dominion over conſcience! Amen and Amen.

Signed by order of
all the Aſſembly by JOHN LIDDON.

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BREVIATES.

Tring, Herts, June 5th, 1781.

TUESDAY evening 5 o'clock. Miniſters, meſſengers, members of the aſſociated, and other churches met. Mr. Pilley of Luton began in prayer. Mr. Giles choſen Moderator. Mr. Baſkerville Secretary. Caſe of Woodrow church, referred to us by the board of miniſters in London, conſidered. Appointed Mr. Robinſon to ſettle it by conference, or letter of advice. Secretary read the letters. General ſtate of the churches diſcuſſed. Mr. Liddon, Paſtor of the church at Hempſtead, was deſired to write the circular letter. Moderator concluded in prayer, and diſmiſſed the aſſembly.

WEDNESDAY morning 7 o'clock. The ſame aſſembly met again. Sung the 8th hymn, 2d book. Mr. Dunſcombe of Coate, Oxon, prayed. Complaint being made by the church at Colnbrook of the profanation of the Lord's day, Mr. Robinſon was deſired to draw up and publiſh a ſmall plain addreſs on the ſubject, in order to guard our churches againſt the abuſe. Mr. Liddon read his plan of a circular letter, which was unanimouſly approved. Sung the 138th hymn 2d book. Mr. Blaine concluded in prayer.

Half paſt 10 *o'clock*. Publick worſhip begun by the Moderator, in ſinging 132 pſalm. Mr. Smith, aſſiſtant to Dr. Gifford, prayed. Sung 133 pſalm. Mr. Robinſon opened the nature of theſe annual meetings by a ſhort diſcourſe on primitive aſſociations, and the characters of meſſengers, referring chiefly to 2 Cor. viii. 23. *Our brethren are meſſengers of the churches, and the glory of Chriſt*, that is of *Chriſtianity*. Mr. Geard preached on the nature, riſe, and progreſs of popery from 1 John, iv. 3. *Every ſpirit, that confeſſeth not that Jeſus Chriſt is come in the fleſh, is not of God: and this is that ſpirit of Antichriſt, whereof ye have heard that it ſhould come, and even now already is it in the world.* Mr. Liddon prayed. Sung the 59th hymn of the firſt book. Mr. Robinſon preached on the ruin of popery from 2 Theſſ. ii. 8. *Whom the Lord ſhall conſume with the ſpirit of his mouth, and ſhall deſtroy with the brightneſs of his coming.* Sung the 56th hymn of the firſt book. Mr. Thomas, of Devonſhire ſquare, London, prayed. Moderator concluded by giving notice that the next Aſſociation would be held at Hertford in Whitſun week, May, 1782. Services to begin at five on the Tueſday evening, ſix on Wedneſday morning, and half paſt 10 in the forenoon. Meſſrs. Sleap and Robinſon to preach, in caſe of failure Mr. Liddon. Mr. Baſkerville preached an evening lecture from Pſalm lxviii. 20. *He, that is our God, is the God of Salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the iſſues from death.*